

The Lab Report

A CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ACCREDITATION PROGRAM (ELAP) NEWSLETTER

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- Introduction to ELAP
- Expert Review Panel
- Program Updates
- Procedural Updates
- Environmental Laboratory Technical Advisory Committee (ELTAC)
- Upcoming Events
- Get To Know ELAP
- Environmental Laboratory Corner

Introduction To ELAP

The Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program was established by the Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Act of 1988 to accredit laboratories that perform analyses on any combination of environmental samples for regulatory purposes. The Act prescribes four programmatic functions to ELAP: certify, inspect, monitor, enforce.

ELAP is part of the Division of Drinking Water at the State Water Resources Control Board and is overseen by Chief Christine Sotelo. She currently directs 24 employees in three different locations- Sacramento, Richmond, and Glendale.



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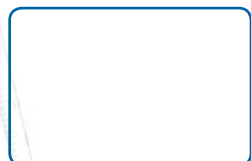
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EXPERT REVIEW PANEL

On July 1, 2014, ELAP was transferred from the California Department of Public Health to the State Water Resources Control Board. An Expert Review Panel (ERP) was convened in partnership with Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) to assess the condition of the program. Records from all Panel proceedings and the Final Findings and Recommendations Report can be found at www.sccwrp.org/elap.

ELAP Management meets quarterly with the Expert Panel to review the program's progress. The first of these meetings took place on February 8th. A recording of the webinar is available on the SCCWRP website.



PROGRESS...

ELAP staff has developed a [Work Plan](#) to guide management during the implementation of the ERP's recommendations. The work plan targets the five programmatic components the ERP recognized as critical elements in reform efforts:

- Management System
- Laboratory Accreditation Standards
- Analytical Methods
- Staff Resources
- Internal/External Communication

Our quarterly newsletter will provide updates on the program activities to support this work plan.

1.0 Adopt an Established Management System – ELAP staff has performed a gap analysis comparing the program's current operations to the standards in TNI Volume 2. The gap analysis identified ELAP's deficiencies and assisted in the formulation of section 1.0 of the Work Plan. ELAP management has selected TNI Volume 2 as its management system and has identified approximately 40 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that will be written. Five priority SOPs have already been drafted and are under review by a Six Sigma Efficiency Expert.

2.0 Adopt Laboratory Accreditation Standards – At the request of the community, ELAP has scheduled two technical workshops in April with an expert on the 2009 TNI Standard. There will be a presentation by the instructor and laboratories will be able to ask questions about the application and interpretation of the standard.

ELAP will hold a three part webinar series this Spring to walk listeners through the analysis performed by our staff on the three laboratory accreditation standard options identified in the ERP report. The webinars will address the advantages and challenges the program faces in implementing and administering each option.

3.0 Ensure Relevant Analytical Methods – ELAP has updated its

certification offerings for Drinking Water and Wastewater in accordance with the California Health and Safety Code. Public release of updated Field of Testing worksheets is expected in March. To update our certification offerings for Hazardous Waste, ELAP must first obtain approval from regulating agencies. Preliminary meetings have occurred to discuss updating the methods they require in permits and for data submission, and we will present a list of recommended method updates to our partner agencies this spring.

4.0 Expand Resources – ELAP has worked in partnership with the Water Board's Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to adjust the program administration fee to cover the expenditures of the program. The fee adjustment is necessary to provide all critical program elements to stakeholders. Stakeholder meetings were held on October 8th and November 20th in Sacramento and via webcast in an effort to bring transparency to the program's financial condition and the internal and legislative processes being used to increase the fee amounts. The State Water Board adopted a resolution to allow the fee increase at the December 1st Board Meeting and the regulation was filed with the Secretary of State on February 1st. All payments received after February 1, 2016 are subject to the new [fee schedule](#).

ELAP management, DAS, and the Water Board recognize the need to reevaluate the fee structure in order to establish a more equitable system. We held two Listening Sessions in February for interested parties to present ideas and opinions about a new structure, with the goal of having one in place beginning 2017. We have begun an intensive stakeholder collaboration process with the goal of selecting a new fee structure by fall.

ELAP is doing preliminary work to procure an assessor training contract from a third-party vendor, as recommended by the ERP. The State Water Resources Control Board will consider a resolution to authorize funding for the contract at its April

19th meeting. We anticipate the contract being awarded in August.

5.0 Enhance Communication – ELAP communicates primarily through the program's email subscription. A postcard was sent in the mail to every certified laboratory highlighting the importance of joining the subscription and giving instructions on how to sign up. Sign up [here](#).



ELAP has also published its Strategic Communications Action Plan, Version 1.0, to its website. The Plan is a living document. It is currently under revision and program staff is consulting with the Water Board's Office of Public Affairs on messaging and the possibility of creating a social media presence for the program. Version 2.0 is expected to be released with substantial changes early spring 2016.

ELAP will launch a redesigned website with an interactive Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Map feature in early spring. The map will be interactive and include each certified laboratory and the Fields of Testing, methods, and analytes they are certified for. The redesign is intended to improve the website's usability and relevance to visitors.

Enforcement – ELAP is working in conjunction with the Office of Enforcement to establish a robust enforcement structure aimed at ensuring ELAP's enforcement function is being fulfilled. California Health and Safety Code (H&SC) statutes provide broad regulatory and enforcement authority to the ELAP. An [announcement](#) notifying laboratories of ELAP's enforcement program was sent to each laboratory via United States Postal Service Certified Mail during December 2015.

Environmental Laboratory Technical Advisory Committee (ELTAC)

ELTAC was established to assist ELAP in technical matters that impact the laboratory community. The committee is composed of approximately fifteen representatives to speak on behalf of interested parties and certified laboratories.

The Expert Review Panel recognized that ELTAC was not being utilized efficiently by the program. They made a preliminary recommendation to management that the committee be revitalized by vacating the currently filled seats and re-writing the by-laws that govern the body. The committee was dissolved mid-2015 and the By-Laws were rewritten and released for public comment on July 10, 2015. ELAP held workshops in Sacramento and San Diego to ask for input and facilitate discussion on the draft. After the comment period closed on August 21, 2015, ELAP made changes to the document based on feedback and rereleased the By-Laws for public comment on October 2, 2015. Workshops were held in Santa Rosa and San Diego to allow stakeholders to comment on the new draft. The public comment period for the second draft will close on December 9, 2015. Both drafts and records of comments are available at www.waterboards.ca.gov/elap.

ELAP released the final draft of the By-Laws on January 18th for a two-week comment period and called for nominations for members of the new committee. New members were announced February 29th. See our website for a list of the new committee members.

PROCEDURAL UPDATES:

Electronic Submission – ELAP is now accepting all documentation via email. You can submit:

- Applications
- Corrective Action Reports
- Change in Directorship Requests (include resume or curriculum vita)
- Proficiency Testing Results

Proficiency Testing Contact – Please update your Proficiency Testing at our agency to Christine Sotelo. Results should be submitted electronically to elapca_pt@waterboards.ca.gov by your vendor. Under the California Code of Regulations all certified laboratories are required to participate in proficiency testing once per year for every certified analysis and submit the results to the program.

Submitting a Complaint – Complaints are an important source of information for ELAP. You can direct your complaint to Chief Christine Sotelo at christine.sotelo@waterboards.ca.gov or (916) 341-5175. You can also file a complaint online at www.calepa.ca.gov by clicking "File an Environmental Complaint". This option allows you to remain anonymous if you wish.

Get to Know ELAP

Interview with Chief **Christine Sotelo**



Q: How would you describe the culture you have established at California ELAP?

A: I've strongly encouraged team culture since taking charge. CA ELAP is a fast-paced team with a unique blend of 24 staff from different generational groups. The generational groups within ELAP allow unique opportunities to learn and strengthen staff skills and abilities from different perspectives. New employees bring fresh ideas and energy while respected, seasoned staff transfer their years of experience and wisdom.

Q: What staff activities do you see as most critical to where the program is at point?

A: Staff recently developed a Work Plan in response to the Expert Review Panel Report. The work plan identifies step-by-step instructions on how to accomplish the Panel's recommendations. While there are several critical ELAP staff activities, most paramount at this time is the implementation of the work plan.

Q: What has been your biggest challenge thus far?

A: Helping staff and the laboratory community understand the magnitude of change needed and the time it will require has been very challenging. I often compare ELAP to a large cruise ship- course corrections will be slow and precise. Successful change to ELAP requires formulation of transformative initiatives, the vetting of options, and frequent review to ensure any decision made is meaningful and sustainable.

Q: What do you consider your biggest success since you took over the program?

A: Release of the Expert Review Panel Report in October 2015. The report is our roadmap to success.

Environmental Laboratory Corner

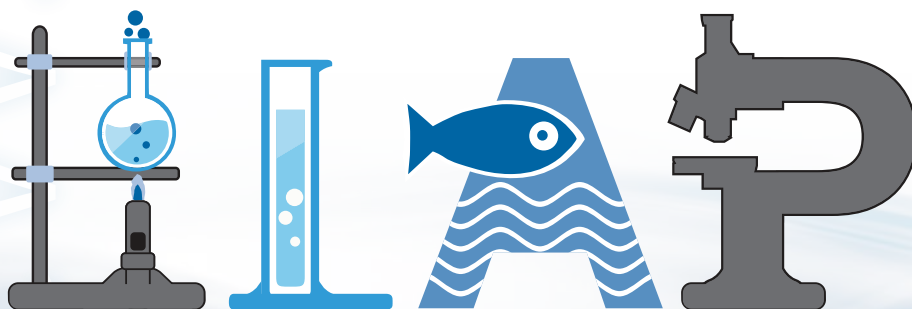
Contributed by: Andy Eaton, Eurofins Eaton Analytical

Thoughts on ELAP

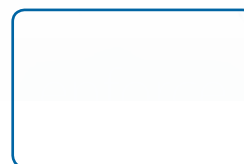
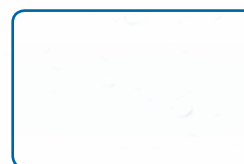
As we enter 2016, it's valuable to look back on where ELAP was a year ago, where they have come in the intervening time, and where they still need to go, at least from the perspective of one commercial lab...

A year ago most labs had little faith in ELAP as a viable entity that could ensure high quality from California certified labs. While we are still a long way from ELAP being an effective accreditation body, a lot has changed. ELAP management recognized the problem and embraced the recommendations of an independent outside panel in terms of changes. ELAP has been reorganized and is now much more "customer centric". Fees have been adjusted to begin to be more reflective of true costs. ELAP is focusing on training of auditors. ELAP is reaching out to the Stakeholder Advisory Group (pending formation of a new ELTAC) for technical input on issues of importance to labs. It's all steps in the right direction and ELAP should be applauded for stepping up to the plate so quickly.

However we are only a little bit down the path and there are a lot of steps still to go, many of which will be subject to lots of discussion and disagreement, most notably getting meaningful acceptable regulations in a timely manner. While many smaller labs have concerns about CA adopting the TNI standard, the Expert Panel certainly strongly encouraged ELAP to use this as a model in that it would not require starting from scratch, and would be readily accepted by other entities. Perhaps it is time for us to come together as certified laboratories and help ELAP figure out how to make this standard work effectively for smaller laboratories rather than looking for alternatives.



Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program
STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD



UPCOMING EVENTS:

- **February 25th & 29th** – Fees Listening Sessions
- **April 5th & 7th** – Technical Expert Workshops on 2009 TNI Standard
- **April 19th** – State Board Workshop on Fee Structure options

See our website for more details.



STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARDS

**For more information,
please visit our website at:**
www.waterboards.ca.gov/elap

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